

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 BRUSSE 02064 051813Z

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ACTION EUR-25

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FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 415
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INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY OSLO
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE
AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS
USNMR SHAPE
USCINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L BRUSSELS 2064

E.O. 11652: GDS
SUBJECT: REPLACEMENT FOR F-104

REF: A. BRUSSELS 457; B. BRUSSELS 2039, C. STATE 68416

1. DURING MY CALL ON FONOFF POLITICAL DIRECTOR DAVIGNON ON APRIL 3, I RAISED THE QUESTION OF THE F-104 REPLACEMENT. REFERRING TO MY PREVIOUS CONVERSATIONS WITH DEFENSE MINISTER VANDEN BOEYANTS (REF A) AND ECONOMICS MINISTER CLAES (REF B), I ASKED HIM (A) TO CONFIRM THAT THE ONLY DECISION THE CABINET HAD MADE REGARDING THE F-104 REPLACEMENT WAS TO NARROW THE CHOICE TO EITHER THE MIRAGE SUPER F-1 OR COBRA, AND (B) THAT THE CARETAKER GOVERNMENT WOULD MAKE NO FINAL DECISION BUT WOULD LEAVE THIS TO THE NEW GOVERNMENT. DAVIGNON STATED THE ANSWER TO BOTH QUESTIONS WAS YES. I THEN ASKED WHETHER ANY OTHER ARRANGEMENTS WITH THE FRENCH

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 BRUSSE 02064 051813Z

HAD BEEN MADE REGARDING THE MIRAGE SUPER F-1. HE SAID

THAT THE GOB HAD REQUESTED AN EXTENSION OF THE FINANCIAL OFFER MADE BY DASSAULT WITHOUT ALTERATION (I.E., NO ADJUSTMENT FOR INFLATION) UNTIL JULY 1. HE SAID NO REPLY HAD YET BEEN RECEIVED FROM DASSAULT. HE ADDED THERE MIGHT BE TECHNICAL DETAILS OF INTEREST TO US WHICH HE WILL HAVE THE FOREIGN MINISTRY FURNISH TO THE EMBASSY EARLY NEXT WEEK. HE ALSO SAID THAT IF ANYTHING OF IMPORTANCE HAPPENS ON THIS QUESTION, HE WILL IMMEDIATELY INFORM THE EMBASSY.

2. DURING MY FAREWELL CALL ON PRIME MINISTER LEBURTON ON APRIL 5, I AGAIN RAISED THIS QUESTION. I RELATED THE INFORMATION WHICH HAD BEEN GIVEN ME DURING MY CONVERSATION WITH VANDEN BOEYANTS, CLAES AND DAVIGNON, WHO HAD INFORMED ME THAT NO FINAL DECISION ON THE F-104 REPLACEMENT WOULD BE TAKEN UNTIL THE NEW GOVERNMENT WAS FORMED. HE REPLIED THAT THIS WAS CORRECT.

3. I SAID THAT I UNDERSTOOD FROM DAVIGNON THAT THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT HAD REQUESTED AN EXTENSION OF DASSAULT'S FINANCIAL OFFER UNTIL JULY 1. HE SAID THIS WAS ALSO TRUE. I THEN ASKED IF THERE HAD BEEN ANY OTHER TYPE OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN THE BELGIANS AND THE FRENCH WITH REGARD TO THE SUPER MIRAGE F-1. HE SAID ONLY IN THE SENSE THAT DASSAULT HAD MADE VERY INTERESTING PROPOSALS ON COMPENSATION AND "COOPERATION", WHEN ASKED WHETHER COMPENSATION AND "COOPERATION" WERE CONFINED TO THE SUPER MIRAGE F-1 PROPOSAL OR INCLUDED OTHER PROJECTS, HE SAID IT WAS ALL WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE SUPER MIRAGE F-1 PROPOSAL.

4. I THEN EXPLAINED OUR POSITION WITH REGARD TO THE PURCHASE OF A REPLACEMENT FOR THE F-104: (A) THAT PLANE CHOSEN SHOULD BE THE BEST ONE IN A TECHNICAL AND MILITARY SENSE FOR NATO; (B) THAT WE FELT THAT COOPERATION WITH THE DUTCH, NORWEGIANS AND DANES IN THIS PURCHASE WOULD FURTHER THE GOAL OF COMMONALITY WITHIN THE ALLIANCE; AND (C) THAT WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF JACKSON-NUNN AMENDMENT, A BELGIAN PURCHASE OF AN AMERICAN AIRCRAFT WOULD BE SEEN AS A VERY POSITIVE STEP IN THE DIRECTION OF OFF-SETTING THE BUDGETARY BURDEN OF MAINTAINING US TROOPS IN EUROPE.

5. LEBURTON REPLIED THAT THE BELGIANS HAD PURCHASED BOEING 737'S ON TECHNICAL AND ECONOMIC GROUNDS, WHICH SHOULD GIVE US CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 BRUSSE 02064 051813Z

CONFIDENCE THAT THE BELGIANS WOULD BUY THE BEST PRODUCT AGAIN THIS TIME. I NOTED THAT IN THIS CASE THE STAKES WERE MUCH GREATER AND HAD SERIOUS MILITARY AND POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR THE NATO ALLIANCE.

6. WITH REGARD TO THE QUESTION OF TACTICS RAISED IN PARA ONE OF REF C, I BELIEVE THAT THE REPRESENTATIONS WE HAVE MADE AND THE ASSURANCES RECEIVED ARE ALL THAT CAN EFFECTIVELY BE DONE

OFFICIALLY UNTIL A NEW GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN FORMED--UNLESS THERE
IS NEW EVIDENCE THAT A DECISION WILL BE TAKEN BEFORE THAT TIME.
AS SOON AS A NEW GOVERNMENT IS FORMED I PROPOSE THAT
STRONG REPRESENTATIONS BE MADE AT THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF THE
BELGIAN GOVERNMENT ALONG THE LINES OF THOSE WE HAVE MADE TO
THE LAST GOVERNMENT. IN THE MEANTIME, IT WOULD BE USEFUL FOR
EMBASSIES THE HAGUE AND OSLO TO KEEP PRESSURE ON THE HOST GOVERN-
MENTS TO ACHIEVE BELGIAN COOPERATION IN FOUR-COUNTRY PURCHASE
OF COMMON US AIRCRAFT. STRAUSZ-HUPE

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